

INTERVIEW WITH ESTHER WOJCICKI

ELLIOTT BLEDSOE AND JESSICA COATES

ARC CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AND INNOVATION,
QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, AUSTRALIA

We begin this issue with an interview with one of today's leading proponents of open philosophies: Esther Wojcicki, the Vice-Chair of the Creative Commons Board of Directors. Having studied at UC Berkley, the Sorbonne and San Jose State University, Esther has taught journalism at Palo Alto High School in California for 25 years, where she has helped to establish and build the largest student journalism project in the US (<http://voice.paly.net>). She has won multiple awards as an educator, including the California Teacher of the Year in 2002, and has worked as an educational consultant to Google, helping to design the Google Teacher Outreach program (www.google.com/educators). She is also a prominent journalist who blogs for The Huffington Post and Hotchalk.

Esther has been on the Creative Commons Board since 2005, and is currently the Vice Chair, with a particular focus on education initiatives.

Below she answers questions on open education, journalism in the digital age, and the meaning of "open".

Elliott and Jessica: As I am sure you are aware Esther, this issue of Platform is themed "Yes, We're Open!" What does 'open' mean to you?

Esther: Open to me means free to use, remix, and share. It also means the freedom to learn whenever and wherever the user has a wi-fi connection and a connecting device.

More specifically, open means that the creators have given prior permission to users to share their creative works – text, video, audio, art, images – provided that the user abides by some of the Creative Commons license restrictions. In some cases it means open to remix, but in others it does not.

There are basically four conditions and six licenses (a combination of the four). The four

conditions are as follows:

1. BY - Give attribution to the author;
2. SA - Share any changes you make under the same license;
3. NC - Only use the work non-commercially; and
4. ND - Don't make changes to the original.

One important goal I have for CC is to spread the word to educators about Open Education Resources (OER) and CC licensing because most educators today are unaware of or cannot find OER and know little about CC licenses. Last spring I gave a talk at Columbia University to a group of educators; I asked the educators to raise their hands if they knew what OER was and only two people raised their hands. That is pretty upsetting. Educators need to know about OER, how to find it, and how to use it.

E and J: You have recently been appointed Creative Commons' Vice Chair, with a focus on learning and education. Thinking about notions of openness, what does this mean for education?

E: In my new role as Vice Chair I am concentrating specifically but not exclusively on OER and CC licenses in education. I am trying to reach out to educators worldwide.

Here are some of my goals in the coming year:

- Update the CC website so that OER and education materials for teachers will be easy to find and featured on the front page;
- Gather already-created teacher and classroom materials about CC and making them easy to find on the CC website;
- Encourage the creation of more OER and CC-in-the-classroom materials worldwide;
- Include educational use cases of OER so teachers can get some ideas of how to use these resources in their classrooms;
- Create an OER-Creative Commons Course that can easily be given as a half day professional development session for teachers and set up a team of CC International Trainers for Education that can go into schools; and
- Improve the quality of OER search by developing a standard or methodology for the tagging of all OER so it can easily be found on Google/Yahoo/Bing searches.

E and J: Commentators have long talked about the importance of media literacy and digital literacy in schooling. Do you feel that rights literacy should be added to this list?

E: It is important for students today to be media and digital literate. I have just developed a website that will hopefully give teachers some lesson plans to help kids be media and digitally literate, but I have also included "rights literate." It is called 21stcenturylit.org¹ and the goal is to provide teachers with lesson plans to teach writing for the web, searching on the web, and rights for the web. The "Rights Literacy" section includes information about copyright and CC licenses, something very important for kids today.

Teachers today need to know how to teach the next generation to share legally on the web. We need to teach kids to respect and understand copyright but also to understand the

use of CC licenses and the power they have in helping kids to share their ideas. Both copyright and CC licenses have their place in society and students need to understand these rights. To accomplish this goal, we need to teach students “rights literacy” which explains and gives examples of copyright and CC licenses.

I am proposing the development of a Creative Commons Course for Educators that will help teachers and students understand a) what is copyright b) how it needs to be modified to meet 21st century needs c) what are Creative Commons licenses and d) how CC licenses can be used both in the educational setting and in the world e) what is OER f) how OER can support the classroom.

E and J: You also work as a journalist, and you've spent many years as a journalism teacher. In that industry there's a lot of attention at the moment on online business models for newspapers. What can CC add to this debate?

E: In my work as a journalist and a journalism educator, I have used CC licenses and encourage my students to do so as well. Before a journalist uses a CC license they should ask themselves if their goal is to get their ideas out on the web or to make money. If their goal is to make money, then they should keep the copyright and not use a CC license. On the other hand, if they want their story and their ideas to spread on the web, then they should use a CC license.

Websites should think the same way. If they want their ideas out there, they should use a CC-BY license. They might want to experiment with only licensing some pages or stories to see how it works if they're unsure. They may be happy to see that the pages that a CC-licensed may spread faster.

Just imagine what would happen on Twitter if all the users required you to request permission and pay to retweet. The power of Twitter as a communication tool would be gone. The same logic works for longer creations. If you tie your work up in copyright, which effectively imposes a high transaction cost, then the power of your ideas is severely restricted.

Non-profit news websites should also consider using CC stories by reliable sources. It looks like the Bay Area is the center for non-profit journalism according to a recent article by The New York Times.

E and J: Is 'open' the new black?

E: Yes, 'open' is the new black. But in fact, being the 'new black' traditionally means it is just a fad; however, this is not true for 'open.' Open is the black. Those outside are looking for ways to be open but need help understanding how to make the transition so they can be part of the future. Can you imagine going to a web where users would have to pay to access their search returns? 'Open' is now.

ENDNOTES

1 <http://21stcenturylit.org>.

2 See “Bay Area Emerges as Center of Nonprofit Journalism” in Bay Area Blog, The New

York Times, <http://bayarea.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/04/10/bay-area-emerges-as-center-of-nonprofit-journalism>.